

vj power of the clergy and the enforcement of moral discipline " cv by the Ecclesiastical Courts. The other is directed against f intellectual beliefs which the Church taught. These two currents of opinion, temporarily driven underground by ^L coercive power, have since arisen and triumphed. They have V in the course of time set the individual entirely free from any • ^ compulsory obedience to priests.

VJ There are therefore two reasons, one general and the other special, for treating ecclesiastical affairs at some length. In any medieval period the Church is almost as important as the State. In this particular period the revolt began which has since become an accomplished revolution. The spirit of ^ this revolt is written large on the literature of the period, and (j is found in the growing hostility of the laity to the clergy.

V g\_u ^ ft would not perhaps attract so much attention from the y ^ modern historian, if it had not been formulated by the •O vigorous intellect of Wycliffe in a body of Protestant doctrine.

He was a man suited for such a task. He was not a careful

&) statesman, fit to gain some slow step of reform by repudiating

P§ all ideas not immediately acceptable to men. He had an

2> eager hatred of what was wicked, and could never be kept

•>2> from denouncing what he regarded as such. Similarly, in

^ matters of belief he invariably exposed what he thought was

false. These characteristics of the chief no doubt ensured

M3> the temporary failure of the party. Yet it may well be

questioned whether they did not in the long run further the

V cause of resistance to Catholic orthodoxy. But although we

ly can only estimate the real importance of the Wycliffite move-

| ment by considering it in relation to later events, we must

§| examine the particular conditions that gave rise to its first

. appearance. It is indispensable to know the state of the

5 Church in the fourteenth century and the character of the reli-

gious instruction which she at that time gave to the nation,

^ in order to understand Wycliffe and his doctrines.

„<« The Mediaeval Church <sup>1</sup> was divided into two parts, the>

tion of the state and influence of the Church at the end of  
some representa-  
the fourteenth  
^J century, I have relied very much, as will be seen by the  
authorities quoted, on  
the consensus of opinion of satirists and other writers of the period.  
I have  
indeed as far as possible trusted to the documents of more  
official and